



## Lessons from Elijah's Life

# Historical Background

Date: 8 January 2020

Text: 1 Kings 17:1

Key Lesson: God's goal in discipline is always restoration.

### God's Demand

Hundreds of years before the days of Elijah, God repeatedly commanded the people of Israel to worship Him only. The very first of the Ten Commandments states, (Exodus 20:2-3) **"I am the LORD thy God, which have brought thee out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of bondage. Thou shalt have no other gods before me."** God strongly warned them against intermarriage with unbelievers (Ex 34:12-17). They promised to be loyal to the Lord (Josh 24:15).

### God's Disdain

God hated idol worship, including Baal worship. The word Baal means "master, owner". Baal was "the chief male god of the Phoenicians and the Canaanites, as Ashtoreth was the chief female goddess."<sup>1</sup> Israelites even sacrificed their children to Baal (Jer 19:5). "Terrible licentiousness not only was sanctioned, but formed part of the worship."<sup>2</sup>

"Baal was the most popular because he was considered the god of fertility in all aspects of life--human, animal, and vegetable. Production and prosperity were dependent on Baal. The Ras Shamrah text, an important archaeological find, praises Baal as the god who has power over rain, wind, clouds, and therefore over fertility. Baal was also worshipped as the weather god, the god of storm, of rain and good crops."<sup>3</sup> God made a mockery of Baal by sending a three and a half year drought.

### God's Disappointment

During the time of the Judges, the people began to disobey and worship idols. King David rid the nations of idolatry. However, Solomon reintroduced it. (1 Kings 11:4) **"For it came to pass, when Solomon was old, that his wives turned away his heart after other gods: and his heart was not perfect with the LORD his God, as was the heart of David his father."**

King Solomon foolishly introduced idol worship in Israel to please the many godless pagan wives that he married. Keathley points out the following about Solomon.<sup>4</sup>

1. He allowed idolatry to invade his kingdom through foreign marriages, a practice forbidden by the Word (Deut. 17:14-20; Neh. 13:23-27).
2. Furthermore, he levied excessive taxes and labor constrictions on the people, without pay, because of his own selfish extravagances.

Because of Solomon's sins, God divided the kingdom when he died. His son Rehoboam was accustomed to living in luxury and reacted in selfish pride when the people asked him to decrease taxes and forced labour. Ten tribes, led by Jeroboam, broke away, yet Jeroboam led them into further idol worship by creating two golden calves. Seventeen times God reminds us that Jeroboam made Israel to sin. Among the eighteen kings that succeed Jeroboam, not one of them was a good king. God said that Omri did worse than all that were before him (1Ki 16:25). Of Ahab, his son, God said, he did evil in the sight of the LORD above all that were before him (1Ki 16:30). (See Chart on back)

By Elijah's day, Israel was in a time of spiritual and moral decay (1Ki 14:23-24). Elijah's mission was to bring them back to God. Elijah's story is actual history. Elijah was a man just like us. The exciting events of his life were real life situations. Elijah lived nearly 3000 years ago and began his ministry about 913 B.C. (See timeline on back).<sup>5</sup>

The high point of his ministry was the contest on Mount Carmel with the prophets of Baal. Keathley gives us this reminder about Elijah, "The hero, then, becomes a model, an example for faith, for spiritual experience and life, and the conflict he is in becomes an illustration of what we face in life."<sup>6</sup>

"With the rise of Ahab in the time of Elijah, things had reached an all-time low. Fifty-eight years had passed since the division of the kingdom. Seven kings had reigned and all were evil. All were idolatrous, but with Ahab idolatry reached an all-time high even to the point of seeking to stamp out the worship of Yahweh altogether. How? Why? Ahab married Jezebel, the famed princess from Tyre, daughter of Ethbaal, King of

<sup>1</sup> Morrish Bible Dictionary

<sup>2</sup> Fausset's Bible Dictionary

<sup>3</sup> Studies in the Life of Elijah, J. Hampton Keathley III, Biblical Studies Foundation, [www.bible.org](http://www.bible.org) 1995

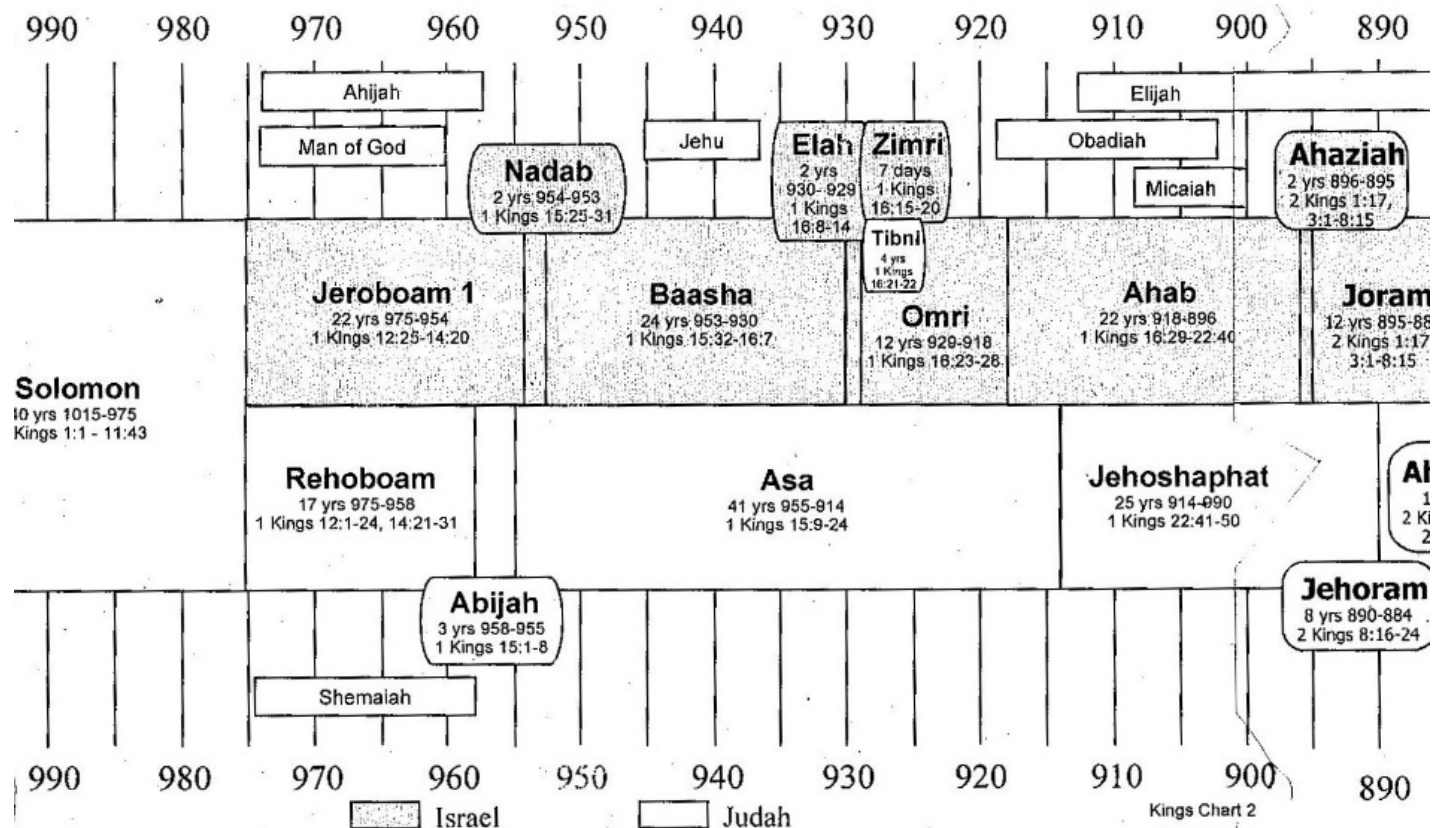
<sup>4</sup> Ibid.

<sup>5</sup> Two dating methods exist for the Old Testament. The more conservative but less popular is represented here.

<sup>6</sup> Keathley

Tyre. Again, following the poor examples that preceded him, his aim was to seal a pact with Phoenicia for profitable political reasons. His trust was in his own schemes rather than in the Lord. The weak Ahab allowed Jezebel to introduce the worship of the satanic and idolatrous cult of Baal-Melqart into Israel.<sup>7</sup>

Jezebel was an avid worshipper of Baal and a ruthless hater of Jehovah. Wicked queen Jezebel sought to kill all the prophets of Jehovah (1Ki 18:4, 13). At the same time, she provided for four hundred and fifty



prophets of Baal and four hundred prophets of the groves (1 Kings 18:19). The groves were wooden images, poles or pillars representing the goddess Asherah. "In her hands her husband became a mere puppet. (1 Kings 21:25)"<sup>8</sup>

### God's Desire

God desired that His people faithfully worship Him and Him alone. He still loved Israel even though they had forsaken Him. (2 Kings 17:13) **"Yet the LORD testified against Israel, and against Judah, by all the prophets, and by all the seers, saying, Turn ye from your evil ways, and keep my commandments and my statutes, according to all the law which I commanded your fathers, and which I sent to you by my servants the prophets."** (Jeremiah 7:25) **"Since the day that your fathers came forth out of the land of Egypt unto this day I have even sent unto you all my servants the prophets, daily rising up early and sending them:"** God is longsuffering.

God sent Elijah to Ahab with His message of judgment because He loved Israel and longed for them to return to Him. God always disciplines His children with the goal of restoring them to right standing. It is for that reason we read in (Proverbs 3:11-12) **"My son, despise not the chastening of the LORD; neither be weary of his correction: For whom the LORD loveth he correcteth; even as a father the son in whom he delighteth."**

### Review Questions

1. What was God's number one demand?
2. What kind of powers did people think Baal had?
3. When did idol worship in Israel begin?
4. Who is primarily to blame for reintroducing idol worship in Israel?
5. About how long ago did Elijah live?
6. What sin did Ahab commit that increased Baal worship?
7. What is God's greatest desire when His people go astray?

<sup>7</sup> Ibid.

<sup>8</sup> Smith's Bible Dictionary